



Black Bear Population

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How many black bears live in Connecticut?

In recent years, the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) and the University of Connecticut (UConn) have conducted research into the size and distribution of the state's black bear population.

According to its public hearing [testimony](#) on HB 5358, *An Act Authorizing Bear Hunting in Litchfield County*, during the 2018 legislative session (see reverse), DEEP estimates that there are approximately 800 black bears in Connecticut, with a growth rate of about 10% per year. (Black bears returned to the state in the 1980's, corresponding with recovery of the state's forests which were extensively cut in the 1800's.)

UConn's research found that in Connecticut bear density varies among different levels of development, with the greatest concentration in "exurban" areas, landscapes with housing densities between rural and urban that is embedded within natural land covers (i.e., between 6 and 25 houses per square kilometer). These areas provide bears with a balance of forest cover and additional food sources.

A resulting research article states that because black bears are "opportunistic omnivores," it may not be difficult for them to adapt to living in exurban and suburban areas (Evans, M.J., J.E. Hawley, P.W. Rego, and T.A.G. Rittenhouse. 2014. [Exurban land use facilitates Human-Black Bear Conflicts](#). *Journal of Wildlife Management* 78:1477-1485).

Black Bear Sightings

DEEP tracks black bear activity in the state and maintains a [list](#) of the number of reported bear sightings it received over the past year.

For the time period of November 15, 2017 to September 25, 2018, there was at least one reported sighting in 145 of the state's 169 towns. The table below shows the towns with the five most reported sightings during this period.

Towns with the Most Black Bear Sightings, 11/15/17 to 9/25/18*

Town	Reports
Simsbury	414
Farmington	413
Granby	380
Avon	378
Torrington	316

**Note: The number of sightings is much greater than the estimated number of bears because each bear may be spotted several times as it travels.*

Black bears are increasing in numbers and being seen more frequently in Connecticut. They are rarely aggressive towards humans but can create a variety of problems. In particular, bears that are fed ... can become habituated and lose their fear of humans.

~DEEP, [Be Bear Aware](#)

Question: What steps can someone take to prevent interactions with bears near their home?

Answer: DEEP provides the following “dos” and “don’ts” for preventing bear interactions at a person’s home:

DO

- Remove birdfeeders and bird food from late March through November
- Eliminate food attractants by placing trash cans in a garage or shed
- Add ammonia to trash to make it unpalatable
- Clean and store grills safely away after use
- Use electric fencing to protect livestock and beehives

DON'T

- Intentionally feed bears
- Leave pet food outside overnight
- Add meat or sweets to a compost pile



Question: Under what circumstances may someone legally kill a bear in Connecticut?

Answer: It is illegal to hunt or trap bears in Connecticut ([Conn. Agencies Regs. § 26-66-3\(f\)](#)). However, a person may kill a bear in self-defense if he or she reasonably believes it is going to kill or seriously injure anyone. DEEP would investigate the circumstances to determine if the killing was justified.

Additionally, state law allows (1) farmers or farm workers to pursue, trap, and kill a bear that damages property on land used for agriculture ([CGS § 26-72](#)) and (2) the DEEP commissioner to kill a bear if there is a public health or safety threat ([CGS § 26-3](#)).

Connecticut Legislative Proposals Concerning Black Bears, 2013-2018

Year	Bill Number	General Concept	Last Action
2013	HB 6654	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires DEEP to (1) sell bear hunt lottery permits for \$10 each and (2) charge \$200 per bear hunt license • Specifies that the DEEP commissioner designates the manner of the hunt but the location must coincide with deer management zones 	Referred from the House to the Finance Committee, Which Voted Out a Substitute Without the Bear Hunt Provision
2016	HB 5315 , as amended by House “A”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows the DEEP commissioner to adopt regulations to ban or restrict feeding bears on property not owned by the state • Provides warnings and educational materials for first-time, de minimis violations, other violations are infractions 	House Passed, as Amended by House “A”
2017	SB 522 , as amended by Senate “A” and “B”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorizes regulations on hunting black bear in Litchfield County, subject to certain restrictions • Requires a report from DEEP on the number of (1) issued black bear hunting licenses and (2) bears killed by hunting 	Senate Amended the Bill with Senate “D” Which Struck the Bear Hunt Provisions
2017	SB 832	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On private property: (1) prohibits feeding, attracting, or enticing certain animals, including black bears, and (2) allows for regulations on unintentional feeding 	Public Hearing
2018	HB 5358	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorizes regulations on hunting black bear in Litchfield County, subject to certain restrictions • Requires a report from DEEP on the number of (1) issued black bear hunting licenses and (2) bear taken by hunting 	Vote Failed in Environment Committee
2018	HB 5469	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases the penalties for illegally taking bear 	Public Hearing

Learn More

[DEEP](#) provides more information about black bears.

[The Bears are Back: Getting to Know Connecticut’s Bears](#), UConn Story Map, Cary Chadwick and Mike Evans.

“Bear Hunting in Selected States,” OLR Report [2016-R-0158](#)

“Feeding Black Bears on Private Property,” OLR Report [2018-R-0274](#)

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